



Winter 2021

healthy LIVING



IS IT TIME TO HANG UP THE SHOVEL?

HEART ATTACKS & SHOVELING SNOW

As we age, we'd all like to think we can still do the things we did when we were younger. However, it's important to recognize our limitations, so denial doesn't cause us to take unnecessary risks.

One of the hidden risks of winter is shoveling snow. It's a mundane task that many of us take for granted. We've always done it, and we assume we can still do it. But is this really the case? And what is it about shoveling snow, in particular, which can put our hearts at risk?

First, it's easy to underestimate how much work it takes to move snow. The first shovel-full is relatively easy. By the twentieth shovel-full, however, our muscles and our heart are beginning to feel the strain. Intense exercise, particularly if we have been leading a sedentary life, can cause our blood pressure to increase.

Secondly, as we age, our risk of heart disease increases. Heart disease can cause our blood vessels to narrow, which raises our blood pressure and makes our heart work harder. Some people know they have heart disease, but many people don't.



They can easily confuse the shortness of breath from a heart attack with the normal shortness of breath caused by physical exertion.

Lastly, cold weather can cause our arteries to narrow, which can raise our blood pressure even further.

If we aren't used to physical activity, have underlying heart disease and undertake hard work in cold weather, it shouldn't be surprising that shoveling snow could bring on a heart attack. If you have any doubts about your health or fitness level, check with your healthcare provider before picking up that shovel.



exercise

COMMON SENSE

Does your New Year's Resolution include starting a new workout plan? If you're trying to figure out what types of exercise to do, here are a few points to remember:

Don't worry about trying to create the perfect plan. Almost any exercise plan is going to make a difference as long as you stick to it. Ideally, you should get 150 minutes of moderate exercise a week, or an average of 30 minutes a day, but there is no perfect set of routines to follow.

Exercise doesn't have to be expensive. There are lots of ways of moving that don't require any equipment. There is also a lot of equipment that gets used for a month and then sold two years later on Craigslist or Facebook Marketplace. Even mowing the lawn or doing heavy housework can count as exercise. If you're moving and it feels moderately difficult, you're exercising.

Two of the major health goals in exercising are burning calories and putting enough stress on the cardiovascular system to strengthen the heart. A target heart rate chart for aerobic exercise can be found at www.heart.org.

The risk of injury with exercise increases with impact, which is when some part of the body comes into contact with the floor, equipment, etc. Swimming, cycling and walking are considered low impact. Running, skipping rope and doing step aerobics are considered high impact. While high impact exercise can strengthen bones, it should be avoided by beginners and by those who are in a weakened condition due to age or some other factor, such as osteoporosis.



Strength training should be done at least twice a week, using all major muscle groups. It helps preserve bone density while increasing muscle mass and muscle strength. It's best to spend about 10 minutes warming up with aerobic exercises before beginning strength training. "Warming up" literally means getting your muscles warm. Cold muscles are more susceptible to injury.

One set of 12 to 15 repetitions will strengthen a muscle as long as you're working hard enough for your muscles to feel tired at the end of the set. You need at least one day of rest between strength training exercises for the same set of muscles. An easy way to do this is to exercise the upper body and the lower body on alternate days.

Remember, no matter what type of exercise you're doing, if it starts to hurt, stop doing it. Your fitness level won't improve if you harm yourself and are no longer able to exercise. If pain continues, see your healthcare provider.

And finally, try to find something you enjoy doing and/or something that you have to do anyway. A new exercise routine shouldn't be a burden that you drag around for a few weeks, finally let go of, and then spend the rest of the year feeling guilty about. If you adjust your exercise to fit your body, your budget, your interests and your schedule, then you'll keep it around, not because you have to, but because you want to.

TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH THIS WINTER

Shorter days, cold weather, holiday stress, and the COVID-19 pandemic can lead many people to feel down in these winter months. Here are a few tips to help fight off the "winter blues":

1. Keep blinds open and lights on during daylight hours
2. Maintain a consistent sleep schedule
3. Bring greenery indoors with house plants
4. Connect with friends and family virtually
5. Exercise, stretch, and move around
6. Try to go outside and get some fresh air at least once per day
7. Get cozy with warm clothing, warm snacks, and hot drinks
8. Try Bright Light Therapy
9. Maintain a balanced diet and be sure to hydrate
10. If you are experiencing more severe symptoms that are impacting your functioning, like those in Major Depressive Disorder with Seasonal Pattern (formerly known as Seasonal Affective Disorder), talk to your healthcare provider.

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